



Alaska State Legislature House and Senate Democrats

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Kapsner Helps Teachers Stay in Classrooms

HB353 accommodates No Child Left Behind provisions

JUNEAU – The House Health Education & Social Services committee met today and passed out House Bill 353, a bill by Representative Mary Kapsner (D-Bethel). HB353 provides an exemption from jury duty for teachers in schools that have failed to meet adequate yearly progress under state and federal law. The bill moves now to Judiciary.

“The role of the classroom teacher has taken on new importance in recent years with the passage of state and federal laws aimed at accountability in education. The ultimate winners or losers of these mandates will be our children,” said Representative Kapsner. “This year high school seniors will be required to pass the high school graduation qualifying exam to receive their diploma. We have added ‘No Child Left Behind’ to our personal vocabulary when we talk about education. NCLB imposes requirements for highly qualified teachers and sanctions on districts that fail to meet ‘adequate yearly progress.’”

Jury duty can be lengthy, resulting in a significant impact on classroom learning. When a teacher is absent from the classroom the flow of learning is affected. In many small communities in Alaska, qualified substitute teachers are simply not available, and the person placed in charge of the classroom may be an aide pulled from other responsibilities or an individual who holds a high school diploma. Moreover, ratio of scale in small communities creates an additional burden on the school. For example, five of the eleven certified teachers in one of the schools in my district were called to Bethel for jury duty this year before this school year was half over.

Although jury duty is an important civic responsibility and part of the foundation of our legal system exemptions are appropriate under certain circumstances. HB353 limits its impact by exempting only those teachers whose school has failed to meet AYP. In a time of so many educational mandates and with a lack of available educational resources in some areas of the state this is a reasonable solution to the problem.

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